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ABSTRACT

Information from six documents produced by experts to compare and analyze the 21 local and community media experiments they had visited in six countries in 1978 and 1979 is consolidated in this report. This information illustrates the variety of ways that different countries handle local media, and examines the role that such media can play either as an arena for political activism or a center for community resources. Included are an analysis of the coverage area of local radio and television experiments in Belgium, Italy, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Ireland and Sweden; a delineation of the number of broadcasting hours for each of the stations visited; and an outline of the financial framework, types of programs, and audiences served by these stations. (MER)

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ALTERNATIVE KIND OF RADIO AND TELEVISION?

A COUNCIL OF EUROPE SURVEY

- o -

by Patrice FLICHY

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In recent years the Council of Europe has commissioned several research projects on local and community media. Paul Beaud has written a consolidated report comparing the policies of the different European countries on the subject (1) and a group of European experts has made a series of visits to observe significant experiments. These macro- and micro-social approaches are of course complementary, for the operation of these experiments can only be understood against the background of the electronic media as a whole in each country. But on the other hand, if we limit ourselves to these general analyses, we miss the significance of the experiments as part of daily life and the way they fit into the local social fabric.

In 1978 and 1979 the group of experts visited a total of some twenty experiments in six different countries - Belgium, Italy, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Ireland and Sweden. Survey guidelines (2) had been prepared beforehand by media specialists as a basis for comparison and analysis of the information obtained during the various visits. In fact, the guide was used more as a list of themes for observation than as a real questionnaire. Only three of the visit reports include explicit replies to the survey guidelines (two Belgian projects and one British one).

Six information documents (3) were produced by the group of experts after the visits. The task of the present report is to draw together the threads of the six country reports. Strictly speaking, this consolidated report should be based on the survey guidelines but, as we have seen, they could not be used by the six rapporteurs because of the great differences between the experiments visited. We felt that it would be easier to do justice to the full diversity of all these experiments by asking questions drawn from a much shorter list of subjects:

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(1) Paul Beaud - Community media? Local radio and television and audio-visual animation experiments in Europe.

(2) Draft guidelines for a European survey - "Video, community television and local radio" DECS/DC (78) 6, Council of Europe.

(3) Michael Barret and Pierre Corset

Report on the visit to Belgian projects - April 1978 - DECS/DC (78) 27

Paul Beaud

Free radio in Italy - report on the visit to Italian experiments - June 1978 - DECS/DC (78) 44

Bernt Jonsson

Local cable television in United Kingdom - report on the visit to Swindon Viewpoint - October 1978 - DECS/DC (78) 69

Sean MacReamoinn

Report on visit to the Netherlands May 1979.

Monica Boethius

Report on the visit to the local and community radio in Ireland - May 1979 - DECS/DC (79) 47

Jean Loup Vichniac

Report of the visit to local and neighbourhood radio stations in Sweden - October 1979 - DECS/DC (80) 1

1. Coverage area
2. Duration
3. Finance
4. Choice of programmes
5. Who makes the programmes?
6. The public
7. Participation

The Council of Europe experts visited 17 radio stations including two cable stations and one mobile one, three local cable television stations and one video centre.

List of projects visited

Belgium		
R TC canal Plus	Liège	Cable television
NO télévision	Tournai	Cable television
Italy		
Radio Cooperativa 106	Rho	Radio
Radio stereo 2000 international	Val d'Ossola	Radio
Nova radio	Milan	Radio
Radio Mare	Viareggio	Radio
Radio Lucca	Lucca	Radio
Radio radicale	Rome	Radio
Radio Città Futura	Rome	Radio
United Kingdom		
Swindon Viewpoint	Swindon	Cable television
Netherlands		
Goirle	Goirle	Cable radio and television
Video centre	Rotterdam	
Zoetermeer	Zoetermeer	Cable radio
Stad radio Amsterdam	Amsterdam	Radio

Ireland		
Mobile studio		Mobile radio
Cork about	Cork	Radio
Radio na gaeltachta		Gaelic-language radio
Sweden		
Radio Kristianstad		Local radio
Radio Bekinge		Local radio
Radio Jönköping		Local radio
Ratio Vättervag		Neighbourhood radio

1. Coverage area

The communications experiments encountered in the course of the six study visits are most frequently described as local. In fact this word can have two meanings; it may mean the opposite of central or national, or it may refer to a geographically limited area. Confusion of the two meanings is a frequent source of ambiguity in the discussion of local and radio and television. There is no doubt that a common feature of all these experiments is to present an alternative form of radio and television to the predominant European system of nation-wide broadcasting of identical centrally-concerned messages. The concept of local electronic media reflects the desire for radio (or television) of a different kind.

On the other hand, these so-called local radio and television stations are not always rooted in a geographically limited community. The coverage area of the twenty or so projects visited spans the full range, from a small village to a whole nation.

Radio na Gaeltachta is an Irish station broadcasting throughout the country to exclusively Gaelic-speaking population groups. At the other end of the scale the Irish mobile radio studio and Radio Kristianstad (Sweden) broadcast locally-produced programmes to small localities.

Between these two extremes of national and village broadcasting we find every possible combination:

Regional broadcasting - the Swedish "local radios" are located in the centre of each of the country's 24 provinces and broadcast to the whole of each province. In Italy, Radio Mare covers the whole coast between La Spezia and Livorno.

Broadcasting in a large metropolis - Stad Radio Amsterdam is received throughout the city. Similarly, Radio Radicale and Radio Città Futura have an audience throughout the whole of Rome. In television, RTC Canal Plus is distributed by the whole of the Liège cable network. Finally, the Rotterdam video centre has an audience in all parts of the town.

COVERAGE AREA OF THE PROJECTS STUDIED

Television	No. of cable network subscribers
Swindon	9,500
Tournai	20,000
Liège	45,000
Radio	**Transmitter power**
Neighbourhood radios (Sweden)	1 W
Radio cooperativa 106	1,800 W
Radio stereo 2000 international	1,000 W
Nova Radio	2,500 W
Radio Mare	250 W
Radio Lucca	500 W
Radio Radicale	2,500 W

Broadcasting in a medium-sized town - The local television station in Tournai (Belgium) and Swindon (UK) fit this definition, as do the Italian radio stations of Radio cooperativa 106 in Rho and Radio Lucca.

Broadcasting in a small town - This is the situation of the Swedish neighbourhood radios. Their transmitters have only a small range (5 km). The Goirle cable radio and television station in the Netherlands operates in a town of 13,000 inhabitants.

To sum up, the term "local" clearly covers a very wide range of projects, whose only common feature is that they differ from the centralised national media.

2. Duration

As regards schedules, the prime characteristic of national radio and television is permanence: they broadcast regularly at the same times. So do most of the local media, though not with the same regularity. Only the experiments with mobile studio-transmitters (notably in Ireland) have broken away from the concept of regularity in the media. The radio no longer serves to measure out the day or the week, but becomes a one-off event. In the Irish project, this event is artificially created by the mobile studio producer who suggests to different localities that the studio visit them for a week. After this outside approach to local life, various cultural projects organised by different local groups take shape. Although the idea of a mobile studio seems quite novel, we may well wonder whether only one is enough for the whole of Ireland. Should not further facilities be provided so that the experiment can be repeated in every district requiring it?

Discontinuous radio broadcasting can also be found outside the institutional framework, in various projects which the Council of Europe experts did not study. These are often radio stations set up by trade unions or other organisations during social conflicts. Usually they last only so long as the conflict continues. This is an example of discontinuous radio which differs from the Irish project in that the initiative comes directly from a particular group within the population. In this case it is indeed true to say that the radio expresses a "dynamic social movement".

Having seen that such non-continuity is exceptional in local radio, we must now turn our attention to the number of hours broadcast by the regular stations. The first finding is hardly surprising: far more hours of radio are broadcast than television, because far more time and money is needed to produce television programmes.

NUMBER OF HOURS OF BROADCASTING BY THE LOCAL RADIO AND TELEVISION STATIONS STUDIED

TELEVISION	
Tournai	1 hr a month
Liège	1-2 hrs a week
Swindon	4-5 hrs a week
RADIO	
Goirle	5 hrs a week
Stad Radio Amsterdam	14 hrs a week
Cork about	7 hrs a week
Radio na Gaeltachta	18 hrs a week
Local radios (Sweden)	15-20 hrs a week
Neighbourhood radios (Sweden)	13 hrs a week
Radio cooperativa 106	17 hrs a day
Radio stereo 2000 international	24 hrs a day
Nova radio	13 hrs a day
Radio mare	24 hrs a day
Radio Citta Futura	24 hrs a day

A marked difference can be seen between publicly-sponsored radio projects which broadcast for a relatively short time (between 5 and 20 hrs a week) and private enterprises (whether commercial of "alternative") which aim to broadcast for as long as possible (between 13 and 24 hrs daily).

The small amount of broadcasting time taken by the "public radios" (1) can be explained in two ways:

1. They can "opt out" from the national network, as do the Swedish local radios. This system, when operated as in Sweden on the most popular national channel, is an important asset to the local radios, since it gives them access to a large audience which is faithful to this channel.

2. Because of the experimental nature of these projects, the authorities preferred to limit their broadcasting time at the initial stage.

In contrast, when the duration of broadcasting time is freely decided by the station managers (as in the case of private radio stations) it is identical to that of the national stations. It is worth noting that it was not so at first. For example, Radio cooperativa 106 started out with 4 hours a day, gradually building up to 17 hours. It is easy to understand this increase in broadcasting by commercial stations, whose advertising revenue is directly related to their broadcasting time; it is less easy to understand why the same should have happened with the alternative stations such as Radio radicale and Radio Città Futura.

"Here too, a certain 'logic' has prevailed. Like the national channels and the commercial free stations, the alternative stations have come to increase the duration of their programmes up to 24 hours a day. The reason given is that, if there are any 'blanks' in the programme, listeners do not acquire, or lose, the habit of listening to the station. The famous 'fear of the vacuum' of radio professionals seems to have reached the underground."(2)

Apart from the question of continuity and length of broadcasting time, management of radio and television time contains a third element, namely programme schudules.

Although our information on the matter is incomplete, it seems that in most of the projects studied the schedule is very strict. The strangest case is probably that of the Swedish "neighbourhood radios", whose programmes are made up or short broadcasts made by different local associations and political or religious groups. To avoid favouring one group at the expense of another, each has the same amount of air time. Equal air time has become so absolute a rule that in Stockholm an automatic clock interrupts programmes when the allotted time is up.

The desire to ensure maximum pluralism has prompted the Swedish authorities to take another odd step: the programming of these stations is centrally organised in Stockholm, although their coverage is purely local.

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(1) We have used "public radio" to mean either radio stations run as part of publicly-owned radio and television services or by other non-commercial organisations under public law. See section 4 for more details.

(2) Paul Beaud, Free radio in Italy.

In Italy, the alternative radios started with extremely flexible schedules. The length of programmes depended on circumstances and local events, so no fixed timetable made it necessary to interrupt a discussion or a report if it ran over time. The flexibility of programming bore eloquent witness to a desire to be constantly responsive to a social movement from which the radio stations claimed to draw their inspiration. Afterwards, as these stations increased their broadcasting time and "filled in the gaps" with music, they developed regular schedules, thereby losing one of their most distinctive features and with it the possibility of greater adaptability in response to events.

3. Finance

As far as finance is concerned, the local stations, just like the national broadcasting services, are faced with the eternal dilemma of public finance versus advertising. A third factor may also enter the equation, namely unpaid work. This is indeed a form of finance, not in monetary form but in kind. We shall see that in a number of cases the involvement of unpaid volunteers enables stations to operate within a very tight budget.

There are several different permutations of the three parameters just mentioned, corresponding to different financing methods.

Finance within the framework of the national broadcasting companies

The Swedish local radio stations are a subsidiary of the Swedish broadcasting service, and are thus financed by the licence fee. The same applies in Ireland to the mobile studio, Radio na Gaeltachta and Cork about. The advertising income of the last-mentioned station is paid directly into the budget of the Irish radio and television service. This provision prevents advertisers exercising any direct or indirect influence on programmes.

BUDGET AND STAFF OF THE PROJECTS STUDIED

	Budget	Year	Permanent paid staff
Television			
Swindon	£45,000	77-78	7
Tournai	153,300 FF	77	5
Liège	934,400 FF	77	13
Goirle	50,000 Fl	78	0

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	Budget	Year	Permanent paid staff
Radio			
Stad Radio Amsterdam	2.3m Fl	78	22
Cork about	£19,200	78	15
Radio na Gaeltachta			35
Swedish local radios			12 - 23
Radio cooperativa 106	70m Lire	78	5
Radio stereo 2000 international	60m Lire	78	3
Nova Radio	300m Lire	78	15
Radio Mare	18m Lire	78	1
Radio radicale	36m Lire	78	6
Radio Cittá Futura	42m Lire	78	3

Other forms of public finance

The Belgian local television stations are financed entirely by grants from three public institutions: the Ministry of French Culture, the municipalities and the Belgian broadcasting service. Stad Radio Amsterdam is also financed by the Ministry of Culture, though allocations come from the broadcasting budget. This method of financing is provisional and will be replaced by local funding. The Rotterdam video centre is in a similar situation, the initial equipment having been financed by the Ministry of Culture and running costs paid by a municipal grant.

Financing by the local population

This may take different forms. In Swindon, two-thirds of the finance is raised by a lottery, the rest being supplied by the television distribution company. In Goirle the "cash budget" is small and subsidised by the municipality. In fact the station is able to operate thanks to volunteers, amateur journalists and technicians drawn mainly from the older age groups.

The Swedish neighbourhood radios operate on a similar system. Productions are financed by associations and political or religious groups. All the staff are activists in these organisations.

In Italy the alternative radios appeal for donations to their listeners or to political activists of similar views to those represented by the station. Staff are mainly unpaid volunteers and the few permanent staff are paid starvation wages (180,000 lire a month at Radio Radicale). However, for some time now Radio Cittá Futura has turned to advertising revenue as a more reliable source of funds enabling it to pay better wages fo its established staff. At the end of 1978 advertising income represented 40% of the budget.

Finance from advertising

The Italian commercial stations are of course financed by advertising. Nevertheless the smaller ones which cannot make enough income depend on volunteers, either in part (Radio Mare) or completely (Radio Lucca). These are often young unemployed people (Radio Mare), who hope for a paid job one day. In other cases volunteers may be teachers or priests who produce programmes on subjects of their own choosing.

This shows that in Italy the distinction between advertising revenue and recourse to unpaid volunteers does not coincide exactly with the dividing line between commercial and alternative radio stations.

4. Choice of programmes

Three different groups may have a say in the choice of local radio and television programmes:

- the public authorities
- the local public
- the staff

Often the choice of programmes is worked out between all three, but in other cases by only two or even one of them.

The triangle of publicauthorities/local public/staff

It is probably in Belgian local television that the interplay between these three groups is most complex. The programmes are determined by a committee composed of members of the general assembly (which itself represents local groups and associations), permanent project staff and representatives of the public authorities. In Liège the public authorities are represented by the head of the local RTB (1) office; in Tournai by municipal councillors Furthermore, these stations operate under a tripartite agreement between the Ministry of Culture, the municipality concerned and the owners of the cable network. The Ministry attempts to ensure that the project operates "in a wide pluralist spirit", and its subsidy is laid down in the agreement. The municipality determines the amount of its grant and any services (municipal news) which it undertakes to commission from the station. The cable distributor undertakes to keep one channel free for the local station's programmes.

In Swindon, programmes are decided by the station manager in accordance with the policy outlines laid down by the association's Board of Directors (made up of local residents). Central government takes a part via the intermediary of the Home Office which issues three-year broadcasting licences and requires outline programme schedules to be submitted at least four weeks in advance. The Home Office may demand to view programmes before broadcasting and may forbid them if it sees fit.

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(1) The Belgian broadcasting company.

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The Irish broadcasting company is directly responsible for the local radio experiments. It appoints a manager who is responsible for programming and seeks the co-operation of the local public in different ways. In Cork and Radio na Gaeltachta the manager is assisted by an advisory committee. The head of the mobile studio, on the other hand, is mainly responsible for planning the use made of the equipment and advising local groups wishing to use the service. When a locality has decided to host the studio, it usually sets up a local committee responsible for preparing broadcasts and programming for the week.

Programmes chosen by professional staff subject to supervision by public authorities

The local population plays no part in programming in the projects which fall under this heading. In the Rotterdam video centre, video recording proposals are submitted by local groups and the team of permanent staff decides which to accept. The team has a very high degree of autonomy, being asnwerable for its actions to the town arts council alone.

The situation of the Swedish local radios is rather similar. The director, appointed by Sveriges Lokalradio (1), decides on allocation of the budget, programming and the working hours and conditions of staff. Only matters of employment and determining the total budget are handled by the central administration, which is small, having little more than thirty staff.

Local teams are also responsible for the material organisation of the station - renting premises, installing fittings, pruchasing equipment etc.

Programmes determined locally subject to supervision by the public authorities

The Swedish neighbourhood radio programmes are made by groups or associations. There is no direct control over them insofar as they are not obliged to observe the same objectivity and impartiality as the local radio programmes. To some extent they are programmes with a deliberate bias.

Nevertheless, the central authorities do have some control over broadcasts since they were responsible for selecting the 16 communities where transmitters have been installed and they authorise different local groups to broadcast, as well as specifying programme length.

Programming by professional staff in conjunction with the public

The state does not intervene in any of the projects discussed under this heading. In Stad Radio Amsterdam programming is decided by the director in accordance with guidelines laid down by the board of governors, which is composed of representatives of the different groups and associations which launched the project.

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(1) The subsidiary company of Swedish Radio-Television responsible for local radio.

Programming undertaken wholly by unpaid volunteers

Goirle local radio and television is the only project in which programming is done entirely by volunteers with no outside supervision. The station staff have joined together in an association which takes on all the responsibilities.

The Italian radio stations

So far we have not mentioned the Italian free radios, where the problem of authority arises in a different form.

In the commercial radio stations, authority obviously lies with the station owner, who either manages the station himself or delegates programming responsibilities to a director. The alternative stations are organised differently, the permanent staff being in control in all cases. In some cases (Radio Città futura) gaps are left in the timetable so as to make broadcasting time available to groups which are independent of the stations.

5. Who produces programmes?

For ten years now most discussion on non-national radio and television projects has centred on the comparative merits of local media versus community media. The key issue is whether the new stations should, like the national stations, have recourse to professionals - the projects' distinguishing feature being their much closer links with the local public - or whether the community should itself run the station, possibly with professional help. Although there is a large overlap with what has been said about control, the difference is that we are here dealing not with powers as such but with production. The central question is who makes the programmes.

It is interesting to note that while the problem of control occurs in different forms in different countries, the professionals versus volunteers controversy is identical in all countries. Within very similar structures, the two Belgian local television projects have solved the problem in quite different ways.

In Liège any groups or individuals can have access to the channel as long as they are resident or active in the town and the programme proposed is of local interest. If they wish, groups can call on technical assistance in making the programme, and advice and help at all stages of production, but the station team undertakes to make no changes in programme style or content. The programming committee ascertains that broadcasts conform to the internal rules, but cannot under any circumstances produce a programme itself.

This system is reminiscent of the principles of community radio fundamental to the Irish mobile studio. According to Eamonn Gaynor, "Community radio should be true access radio. People in the areas must have fullest possible access to the microphone, both as participants and organisers, with a minimum of direction from outside agencies."

To come back to Liège, we find that the principle of production by volunteers is not without problems. According to the Council of Europe experts, one overriding difficulty lay in the quality of the programmes produced by groups, who countered with the argument that they could not keep equipment long enough to become familiar with it

But there is not enough equipment available for it to be loaned for longer periods. Furthermore the station staff responsible for liaison with the groups are not professionally trained in video work, " ... which means that their activity is confined to eliciting projects from groups, and giving them a brief technical introduction to the handling of the equipment. As a result, groups are often disappointed by the final product, which does not correspond to their expectations. In addition to the fact that production groups cannot achieve sufficient mastery over the idiom to turn out quality tapes, their scenarios often prove too superficial, too little work has been done on the subject which is to be translated into sound and picture to produce a full scenario; and for another, the audio-visual treatment of the subjects is too general, because the producers have not gained enough control over the language and, even more, the phases of production itself - filming, sound recording and editing."

Swindon operates in a very similar way to Liège. On the principle of "public access", any resident of the town can come and borrow a camera and video recorder. The tape is provided free. The staff have gradually become aware of the risks inherent in this policy. They wondered whether they had been too "purist" about access and neglected the rights of the viewers. There seems to be a greater emphasis now on the need for programme producers to have sufficient training to make an interesting production.

The policy adopted in Tournai is the complete antithesis of that in Liège and Swindon. The production team makes all the programmes, which are based either on themes suggested by the team or on scenarios presented by groups. By making it possible to produce high-quality broadcasts (1) this operating method has the advantage of giving the project undeniable public credibility. But there is also one drawback: programmes on matters of local and/or regional interest are fairly similar to those produced by the Belgian national television company. It is therefore unlikely that a new style of audio-visual expression will be able to develop which differs from that of the mass media and could come only from free expression by the groups.

The same divisions as in Belgium is found in the Netherlands between a project like Goirle, where all programmes are produced by amateurs without professional help, and the Amsterdam radio which, while it provides a mouthpiece for the differenc communities in the city, continues to operate along very traditional lines. Where the station differs from the mass media is in the subjects tackled (housing, immigrants, consumer affairs form the bulk of its subjects) rather than in the way in which programmes are made. In this way Stad Radio Amsterdam preserves a very professional approach. "Before the station is made more easily accessible to the public, people must be trained in the technical aspects of radio - but the staff cannot undertake this, for lack of time ..." (2)

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(1) The technical decisions reflect station policy: Liège uses half-inch black and white, Tournai three-quarter inch colour.

(2) Paul Beaud, Community media? op. cit.

The problem of professionalism becomes even more acute when local radio stations are managed by the national radio and television companies. In Sweden the local radio stations are operated by professionals, who are contemptuous of the neighbourhood radio stations. The staff of Radio Jönköping think that Radio Vättervag (a neighbourhood station in the same town) brodcasts utterly uninteresting, poor quality programmes and that the truly dynamic local forces will have nothing to do with the neighbourhood station and address themselves to the local radio. They maintain that the government took a wrong turning with its experiemnt in neighbourhood radio and would do better to spend the money on developing local radio, which alone is capable of defending the country's interests.

The trade unions have a slightly different position. They accept the existence of the neighbourhood radios, but would not allow anyone from neighbourhood radio to work as a professional. Thus, although neighbourhood radio seems to offer a way in, it may ultimately act as a barrier to a career in radio.

It is in Italy that the problem of transfer from the amateur to the professional level is most acute. When the free radios started, most of them made use of amateurs. Radio offered openings to young "drop outs" and young unemployed people. These amateurs gradually took on part-time or even full-time jobs in the commercial radio stations, thereby entering the professional world. Things were different in the alternative radios which at first wanted to break down the distinction between professionals and non-professionals. Their slogan of "giving a voice to those who have none" meant that by definition anybody could produce a programme. The stations have evolved since" in the same way that their scheduling has become much tighter, their operators have become radio professionals.

These new journalists have met with hostility from the journalists' unions and most have been unable to obtain press cards. Thus the legal responsibility for a station, like Radio Cooperativa 106 is fictitiously assumed by a sympathetic journalist. The trade unions are lobbying for very strict professional conditions to be imposed under the future law on local radios.

Although the problem of whether to opt for professionals or amateurs arises in all the projects we have studied here, the distinction between the different modes of operation this entails is less clear-cut than might at first appear. "The theoretical distinction between local and community programmes is perhaps less important that a clearer definition of who initiates a given programme, who researches and produces it, who operates the recording equipment, who takes the editing decisions and who accepts responsibility for the transmitted content." (1)

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(1) Report on the Belgian projects.

An enquiry in Swindon distinguished three stages in the process of making a programme - the idea for the project, the production, and checking the finished product - and examined which of the professional staff or the public took charge of each stage.

	Professional Staff	Public
Idea for the project	23%	77%
Production	85%	15%
Supervision of finished product	39%	61%

Thus, even when the project aims to be community television, most programmes are in fact produced by the station team. Conversely, a television station like Tournai, despite its apparently professional mode of operation, produces scenarios written by local groups, who thereby retain full control over programme content.

6. The public

Most of the local radio and television stations lack the means to make accurate surveys of their audience, normally settling for subjective knowledge of their public through the various contacts they may have (telephone calls to the station, generall assembly of members or advisory countil etc). Of the twenty-odd experiments studied, we have audience statistics in only four cases.

Audiences of the experiments studied

(as percentage of target population)

	Daily audience	Weekly audience
Radio		
Radio na Gaeltachta	26%	
Swedish local radios	45%	
Television		
Swindon		29%
Liège		6 to 8%

It is hard to draw any conclusions at all from a table of this kind. We know that on balance professional projects have a larger audience than community projects (though obviously comparisons can only be made in respect of the same medium with similar amounts of broadcasting time), but this has to be interpreted with caution. The professional projects' larger audience is due not only to higher-quality programmes, but also to more frequent broadcasts, which ensure that the public more readily form listening habits. Generally speaking it is easier to capture an audience with a style resembling the traditional conventional mass media than with an "alternative" style of programming.

Some stations also seem to have a very variable audience, as in the case of the Italian alternative radio stations. Radio Città Futura's audience fluctuates with the political climate. This is perfectly normal for a station which aims to identify itself with a social movement.

Finally, it should be made clear that an overall audience figure is not necessarily a suitable yardstick for local media. Some stations are intended for the whole of the public in a particular area, others only for a limited audience. The organisations which use the Swedish neighbourhood radios address their programmes firstly to their own members and secondly to possible sympathisers. It follows that a programme produced by a local association with 300 members, if it is heard by 200 people, however low this figure may seem in fact has a very high audience rating. Video centres and community television stations aim not simply to address an audience but also to stimulate groups to reflect on themselves and present an account of their activities. This second aim is at least as important as the first, and its success obviously cannot be quantified.

7. Participation

The authors of a report on participatory radio wrote recently (1):

"We contend in this paper that technological development which has helped to bring about the destruction or submergence of local cultures and so to increase the individual's isolation and cultural neuterisation can be a source of great strength to cultural development. Through the re-establishment of sustained meaningful interaction between people at a very local level, through the dialogue made possible by the two-way media, participation in a cultural and social identity can take place instead of wandering in a void. Technology can help to initiate and strengthen rather than destroy the delicate networks of human relationships which are the fertile soil of imaginative and creative production and action."

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(1) Larry Soule and Vivan Soule, "Two-way radio and socio-cultural development", CCC/DC (76) - 96, Council of Europe, Strasbourg 1977.

The participation made possible by the local media could reflect a vision of society involving far more than the role of the media alone. Participation in the local media might ultimately be encouraged with either of two aims: to develop a new media style, or to change social relationships.

The Swindon Viewpoint staff distinguish three possible policies for a local television station: to be a "small conventional television station", to form a group of professionals working with selected groups for social change; or to become a neutral resource centre available to everyone as a vehicle for local communication.

The first of these obviously has nothing to do with a policy of participation, but the two others sum up the two main approaches of the participatory media. The neutral resource centre is a technical tool allowing the public to express itself; the staff of the centre must help various social groups to use this communication tool, but under no circumstances should they encourage the creation of such groups or take a hand in their development. "Participation in social change" is quite a different approach, part of the English-speaking world's concept of "community development", whose aims are to change the attitudes and habits ofa local community.

The Swindon team has chosen the resource centre as the model for its participatory system. It is safe to say that this is the choice made by most of the projects studied which have taken public participation as the keynote of their activity, whether in Liège, the Rotterdam video centre, the neighbourhood radios or the Irish mobile unit. The idea of considering local media as agents of social change has been adopted in some cases in Canada (1) but in Europe it has remained a talking-point and has never been put into practice.

In a very different ideological context from that of "community development", the Italian alternative radio stations have tried to create close links between a branch of the media and a whole political and social current - the "movimento". There is no doubt that stations like Radio Popolare in Milan and Radio Città Futura in Rome have played a large part in some political operations launched by the Italian extra-parliamentary left.

The nature of the participation developed by the local media, whether as resource centres or as instruments of political activism, deserves a closer look. It certainly appears extremely fragmented. The neighbourhood radios are a good case in point, since they provide a series of programmes made by groups addressing their members. The "self-service" slots allocated by the Italian alternative radio stations to groups producing their own programmes have often operated in the same way. Consequently, when a broadcast breaks completely with professional standards, the only audience of which it can be sure is that made up of members of the broadcasting group. Here the policy of participation comes up against an essential restriction.

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(1) See J F Barbier-Bouvet, P Beaud and P Flichy, "Communication et pouvoir, mass media et media communautaires au Québec" - Paris Anthropos 1979.

There is, however, another kind of participation which is far more widespread in local radio: direct phone-in programmes. People often make fun of this kind of participation, stressing the unequal relationship between station and caller. Certainly the telephone cannot transform radio into a two-way medium. But when it becomes a mass phenomenon, at least something is changing in the relation between the public and the radio. Paul Beaud has this to say about the Italian stations:

> "It is certain that, in programming, which elsewhere was usually very unimaginative frequent recourse to the telephone for live broadcasts constituted an important novelty and a means for participation of the public which no other medium offered. When we know that each transmitter receives daily up to several hundred telephone calls, a good proportion of which go over the air air, and if the number of calls is multiplied by the number of existing stations (probably 2,000 at the present time), it is easy to see that we are dealing with a collective phenomenon and that no country has witnessed, like the Italy of today, so wide a participation of the masses through an electronic communication medium."

In the other European countries, local radios are obviously fewer in number, but it is safe to assume that an increase in them will help to change the relationship between the public and the radio in this way.

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At the end of this report, the reader will no doubt feel that there is little in common between the different European experiments in local media. Although until the end of the 1960s the big national radio and television companies were so similar that it was possible to talk of a European public broadcasting model, by contrast with the American commercial pattern, the local electronic media are extremely diverse. Their expansion is due to several causes including the emergence of new technologies (light weight video, cable etc), the crisis in the national media, and the resurgence of regional aspirations. These various factors have combined in different ways in each country, giving rise to very different types of venture.

The comparison we have tried to make here between the projects cannot be exhaustive, since we have deliberately ignored the backgrounds of the different operations. The value of the comparison is more to show that there are several possible ways of tackling each of the problems raised by the local media. The report aims to do no more than contribute some information to the discussion taking place in several countries about the local media.